



Veterans Report 2013

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Dear Vermont Veteran,

Let me take this opportunity to thank you and your family for your service to our country.

As the new Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I look forward to working for service members, Reservists, National Guard members, military retirees, veterans and their families to provide them timely access to their earned benefits. In that regard, I believe that we are making progress. More, however, needs to be done.

In Vermont, in the last several years, we have made good progress in primary health care by expanding the number of Community-Based Outreach Clinics (CBOCs) in the state from three to five. In addition to the long-standing clinics in Colchester, Rutland and Bennington, we have added beautiful new facilities in Brattleboro and Newport. We have also recently made some significant improvements to the VA Medical Center at White River Junction – including a new health facility for women veterans and an inpatient treatment center for substance abuse.

Recently, the VA released a report to Congress that homelessness among veterans had declined 17.2 percent since 2009. In Vermont, we have been able to effectively address this crisis through the construction and improvement of a number of facilities, such as the Canal Street Veterans Housing in Winooski, the Veterans' Place in Northfield, the Dodge House in Rutland, the Veterans Inc. Transitional Housing in Bradford, and Home At Last in Brattleboro. These nonprofit programs are truly helping veterans and their families in their time of need.

While we work to expand and improve VA health care, housing, educational opportunities and other programs, I am mindful of the concern that many have about the length of time it takes to process VA disability claims. No veteran in this country should have to wait years to have a claim processed. The very first hearing I held as Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, on March 13, addressed this serious issue. At that hearing, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki told the Committee that he was working to transform the benefits system, which is bogged down with paper, into a modern, digital, paperless system. His goal is to ensure that, by 2015, claims will be completed in 125 days with 98% accuracy. I look forward to working with the Secretary to make that ambitious goal a reality.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank virtually every Veterans' and Military Service Organization in the country who joined me in opposing the adoption of the Chained Consumer Price Index (CPI) for calculating the annual Cost-Of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) for veterans' disability compensation, veterans' survivors compensation, Social Security compensation and military retirement pay. The Chained CPI formula would reduce future COLAs for disabled veterans by tens of thousands of dollars during their lifetimes. The Chained CPI would also make significant cuts in Social Security. Deficit reduction is a serious issue that must be addressed, but we must not balance the budget on the backs of some of the most vulnerable people in our country.

Lastly, I would like to invite you to a Town Meeting on Veterans' Issues that I will be holding on Saturday, June 1. We will start the day with a meeting in White River Junction, followed by meetings in Brattleboro and Bennington. For more information about those meetings or if you think that we can help you with any problem you may have with the VA, please give my office a toll-free call at 1-800-339-9834. More information about the Town Meetings is on the back page of this newsletter.

Again, thank you for your service to our country,

Sincerely,


Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

sanders.senate.gov

Deborah Amdur is the New WRJ VA Medical Center Director

Deborah Amdur recently assumed her position as director of the White River Junction VA Medical Center. She has spent more than 20 years in the Department of Veterans Affairs in clinical, operational and program development positions. Most recently, she helped implement a groundbreaking program that provides new benefits and expanded services for eligible caregivers of seriously injured post 9/11 veterans.

As director, Ms. Amdur will oversee the daily operations of the center and seven Community-Based Outpatient Centers serving veterans and their families in Vermont and New Hampshire.

"When I met with the new director in my office, I could sense her enthusiasm," said Senator Sanders. "I have already been impressed by her



Deborah Amdur, Director of the White River Junction VA Medical Center. (Photo by Tim Calabro, The Herald of Randolph.)

willingness to get around the state and meet with veterans and the staff who serve them. With her background in social work and previous accomplishments, I anticipate she will be a 'veteran-centric' leader and play a great role in making sure that our veterans get the high quality health care and other benefits they deserve."

What is a VET Center?

The Vet Center Program operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs provides a broad range of counseling, outreach and referral services to help combat veterans adjust to civilian life. Family members also are eligible for services to help with a successful post-war adjustment in or near their hometowns.

The centers – including two in Vermont at South Burlington and White River Junction – are popular because they help veterans avoid red tape, according to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "Vet centers are casual, comfortable, and they are normally staffed by combat veterans. They have been there, done that. They understand," a spokesman said.

If you or a family member served in a combat zone and received a military campaign ribbon, you are eligible for Vet Center services that include help finding jobs, screening for medical care, post-traumatic stress disorder counseling, help dealing with drug or alcohol abuse, military sexual trauma counseling, individual and group counseling, family counseling for military-related issues and bereavement counseling.

Founded in 1979 to help Vietnam War veterans readjust to civilian life, Vet Centers now serve all wartime veterans. All of the



Vermont VFW storms Capitol Hill.

services are free-of-charge to eligible veterans and their families.

Nationwide, nearly three-quarters of the staff at Vet Centers are veterans themselves. This allows the staff to make a better connection with veterans who might not otherwise seek services they need.

In Vermont, the South Burlington Vet Center is located at 359 Dorset Street, South Burlington, VT 05403. The phone numbers are (802) 862-1806 or toll free at (877) 927-8387. The White River Junction Vet Center is located at 222 Holiday Drive, Gilman Office Building 2, White River Junction, VT 05001. The phone numbers are (802) 295-2908 or toll free at (877) 927-8387.

CBOCs Relocated in Newport and Rutland

The White River Junction VA Medical Center recently relocated two of its Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) to new, larger facilities to meet the growing demands for primary care.

In Newport, the Clinic moved from the second floor of the North Country Hospital into a newly renovated facility at 1734 Crawford Farm Road. Dr. Marvin Kendall and his staff now have their own lobby, examination rooms and offices to continue timely access to quality health care for veterans living in the Northeast Kingdom. The new CBOC now has the capability to provide telemedicine services for certain veterans. Currently, the Clinic is open three days a week. Call (802) 334-9700 to make an appointment.

In Rutland, Dr. Lees and his staff have moved into a much larger facility at 232 West Street. The new building has a large lobby and plenty of convenient parking. The Clinic is open five days a week and also offers telemedicine services. Call (802) 772-2300 for an appointment.

The Colchester Clinic, the busiest in the state, will be replaced by a new facility almost twice as large. The new Clinic will be housed in an old cotton mill located at 128 Lakeside Avenue in Burlington. This new CBOC will occupy more than 16,000 square feet in the refurbished building. The construction project will create an estimated 75 jobs. The VA anticipates the new CBOC will be completed by the end of the year.

“During the Grand Opening events at each of these new CBOCs, veterans were pleased with what they saw,” said Senator Sanders. “They seemed impressed with the larger facility, as well as the personal attention paid by the dedicated staff.”



You May Be Eligible

In 1996, the Veterans Administration opened enrollment in the VA health care system to all eligible veterans; however, the response overwhelmed the system. Therefore, in January 2003 the VA once again restricted enrollment of any new Priority Group 8 veteran.

That said, many veterans may be unaware that they are currently eligible for enrollment. For instance, all recently separated veterans with service in Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible to enroll within five years of their discharge



Chairman Bernie Sanders questions VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, VA Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, and others on issues related to veterans benefits.

from active-duty. There are also other recent changes that have expanded eligibility among Priority Group 8 veterans.

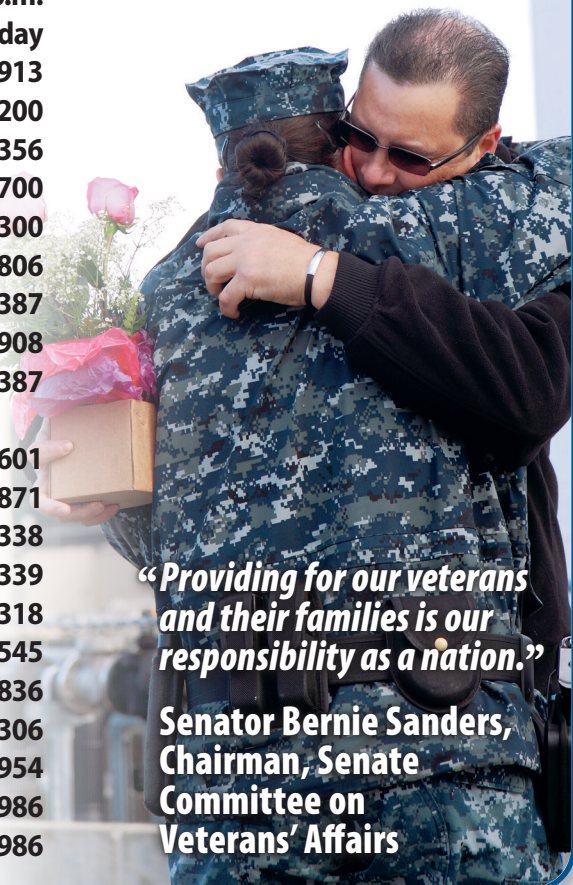
“Throughout Vermont, I have met veterans who are between jobs or have had a change in their personal financial situation,” said Senator Sanders. “They may now be eligible to enroll and just don’t know it. I would encourage them to stop in and enroll. Let the VA determine if you are now eligible to enroll.”



VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and others from the Veterans Administration testify before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

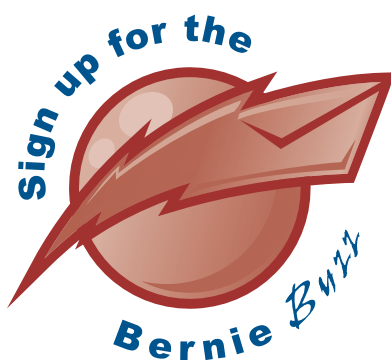
Quick Reference Directory

Veterans Crisis Line:..... 1-800-273-8255 (Press1)
 White River Junction VA Medical Center.. 1-802-295-9363 8 a.m.-4 p.m.
 1-866-687-8387 24 hours a day
 Bennington Community Based Outpatient Clinic.....1-802-447-6913
 Brattleboro Community Based Outpatient Clinic1-802-251-2200
 Colchester Community Based Outpatient Clinic1-802-655-1356
 Newport Community Based Outpatient Clinic.....1-802-334-9700
 Rutland Community Based Outpatient Clinic1-802-772-2300
 South Burlington Vet Center.....1-802-862-1806
1-877-927-8387
 White River Junction Vet Center1-802-295-2908
1-877-927-8387
Department of Labor Veterans' Representatives
 Barre Resource Center.....1-802-476-2601
 Bennington Resource Center.....1-802-447-2871
 Burlington Resource Center.....1-802-652-0338
 Middlebury Resource Center1-802-652-0339
 Morrisville Resource Center1-802-888-1318
 Newport Resource Center1-802-334-6545
 Rutland Resource Center.....1-802-786-8836
 St. Albans Resource Center1-802-865-1306
 St. Johnsbury Resource Center1-802-748-4954
 Springfield Resource Center1-802-359-3986
 White River Junction Resource Center1-802-359-3986



*"Providing for our veterans
and their families is our
responsibility as a nation."*

**Senator Bernie Sanders,
Chairman, Senate
Committee on
Veterans' Affairs**



Bernie will send you an email update
providing you with a fresh
perspective on events as only he can.
Go to sandersonsenate.gov to sign up.

TOWN MEETINGS ON VETERANS ISSUES

• • • SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 2013 • • •

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION

9:30 a.m. Brunch Provided
 10 a.m. Meeting Begins
 VA Medical Center
 Building 44, Room 103
 215 North Main Street
 White River Junction, VT

BRATTLEBORO

12 noon Lunch Provided
 12:30 p.m. Meeting Begins
 Brattleboro VFW
 40 Black Mountain Road
 Brattleboro, VT

BENNINGTON

5:30 p.m. Dinner Provided
 6 p.m. Meeting Begins
 Second Congregational Church
 115 Hillside Street
 Bennington, VT